

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (A.D. 642-728) was one of the most distinguished religious teachers in the first century of Islam. He was well known for his piety and his erudition. His kind of piety caused the Ṣūfis to acknowledge him as one of their fore-runners. Later "orthodox" writers are very much concerned to count al-Ḥasan among their own predecessors. On the other hand, the Mu'tazilites regarded him as one of the early Qadarites. They emphasized the fact that the founders of their own school came from his circle in al-Baṣra.

See *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leyden, 1953, s.v. "al-Ḥasan b. abi'l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī" and the literature mentioned there. On the Qadarites, cf. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932, pp. 52-53. See now H. Ritter, *EI*², vol. III, pp. 247 f. 3.

How much al-Ḥasan was appreciated by his contemporaries, how strong was the moral authority he had over them, is borne out by the amount of concern the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik had for al-Ḥasan's views. When he got word that the sage had "discussed predestination (*qadar*)" in what seemed to the ruler to be an unheard of manner, he deemed it necessary to address a personal letter to him. In this short note the Caliph demanded that al-Ḥasan explain and justify his views to him. Al-Ḥasan answered in a long letter. At the present stage of our knowledge this letter is the earliest document which deals systematically with the question of man's moral responsibility in the face of the Koranic notions of God's fore-knowledge and predestination. This exchange of letters was edited by H. Ritter on pages 67-83 of his article *Studien zur islamischen Frömmigkeit I, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*, in *Der Islam*, vol. 21, 1933, pp. 1-83.

The Umayyad rulers were interested in fostering the belief in predestination. As long as their rule and their actions were thought to be pre-ordained they were

* This article is based on the first chapter of a thesis which was written under the supervision of Dr. Richard Walzer, F.B.A., Reader in Arabic and Greek Philosophy in the University of Oxford. 1.

not open to censure. This has been pointed out by I. Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, 2nd ed., Heidelberg 1925, pp. 91-93; A. Guillaume in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1924, p. 62, l. 27 f.; H. Ritter in *Der Islam*, vol. 21, 1933, p. 59; and W. Thomson in *The Muslim World*, vol. 35, 1945, pp. 294 f. Compare the determinists' refusal to pass judgment on the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj in al-Malaṭī, *Kitāb al-Tanbih*, ed. S. Dederling, Istanbul, 1936 (Bibl. Isl. 9), p. 131, l. 20.

Sections of the letter are quoted in the portion of Ibn al-Murtaḍā's encyclopaedia, re-edited by S. Diwald-Wilzer as *Die Klassen der Mu'taziliten*, Wiesbaden, 1961 (Bibl. Isl. 21), pp. 19 f.; cf. J. Obermann, *Political theology in early Islam*, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's treatise on *qadar*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 55, 1935, pp. 138-162. W. Thomson, *The conception of human destiny in Islam*, in *The Muslim World*, vol. 35, 1945, pp. 281-299.

I propose to analyze al-Ḥasan's letter in detail, hoping to show that a considerable number of the major points dealt with constantly in later discussions occur here already. This in spite of the marked difference in approach between him and the *mutakallimūn*. I shall not follow the order of the text, but consider together passages that deal with the same idea.

After a short formal address to the Caliph and praise to God, al-Ḥasan says (*Der Islam*, vol. 21, 1933, p. 68, l. 2 f, cf. *Klassen*, p. 19, l. 10-14), that the predecessors (*salaf*, who in his case are the Companions of the Prophet) used to adhere to the word of God and "would not use any arguments but those which God makes use of in addressing his creatures in His Book" (l. 5-6).

God has said, "I have created jinn and men only in order that they worship Me. I do not require any sustenance from them; neither will I that they feed Me" (Koran LI, 56-57). Thus He commanded them to worship Him, for which (purpose) He had created them, and God is not one to create them for a purpose and then intervene between them and it (to prevent them from fulfilling it), because He does not wrong (His) servants (*laysa bi-ẓallām li'l-'abid*) (Koran III, 182/178) (p. 68, l. 6-9).

The argument that according to Koran LI, 56, God's purpose in creating man was to make him serve Him (compare also, p. 79, l. 17-19) and that therefore He will not prevent him from this service (by pre-ordaining his disobedience), will be met later as one of the stock arguments of the Mu'tazilites.

See e.g. al-Ash'arī, *al-Idāra 'an uṣūl al-dīyāna*, Cairo, 1348, p. 55, l. 13-16; *id.*, *al-Luma'*, edited by R. J. McCarthy in his *Theology of al-Ash'arī*, Beyrouth, 1953, par. 159; al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, ed. R. J. McCarthy, Beyrouth, 1957, p. 316, l. 5-12; al-Ṣāhib Ibn 'Abbād, *al-Idāra 'an madhhab ahl al-'adl*, edited by Muḥammad Ḥasan Āl Yāsīn in his *Nafā'is al-makḥḥūfāt*, fasc. I, Najaf, 1952, p. 21, l. 1-7; *id.*, *al-Risāla fi 'l-hidāya wa'l-dalāla*, ed. Ḥusain 'Alī Maḥfūz, Tehran, 1374/1955, p. 49, l. 8-13. See also the commentaries of Mu'tazilites like al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, ed. Nassau-Lees, Calcutta, 1856-59, vol. II, p. 1414 and al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, Sidon, 1932-39, vol. V, p. 161. The fact that this verse provided

an obvious argument in favour of the Qadarite's view, led very early to attempts on the part of their opponents to interpret the verse in accordance with the doctrine of predestination. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, ed. Būlāq 1328, vol. XXVII, p. 8 attributes to Zayd ibn Aslam and to Sufyān al-Thawrī the following interpretation: God has created those predestined to be blissful to worship Him, but not those whom He has predestined to be wretched. The interpretation al-Ṭabarī favours is that of Ibn 'Abbās, quoted by al-Ṭabarī as well. It is that God has created all men so that they should acknowledge either willingly or unwillingly that they are His slaves.

Al-Ḥasan goes on to say that in the previous generation, i.e. the time of the Prophet, nobody denied this, nor even raised this question: they were unanimous on this point (l. 9-10). If he is now starting this discussion (*aḥdathnā 'l-kalām fīh*), it is because people have begun to deny that God will never prevent man from worshipping Him. They have taken to misleading opinions (*al-ahwiya al-muḍilla*) and grave sins, and distorted the Book of God (l. 10-11). Divine religion is not to be judged by man's desires (*bi'l amānī*)—he quotes Koran IV, 123 ("Not according to your desires nor the desires of the People of the Book. He who does evil, will be recompensed for it.")—and any statement for which there is no proof (*burhān*) from the Koran is an error (*dalāla*), he says, referring to verse XXVIII, 75: "And We shall say 'Bring your proofs'. And they shall know that the truth is with God alone". (l. 11-ult.).

We have seen that al-Ḥasan is confident that God will not prevent man from serving Him "because He does not wrong man". Thus we arrive at the central questions of theodicy: Are man's evil acts pre-ordained by God? If so, God could be said to wrong man (in denying him his chance to do good and deserve his reward. This is the meaning implied by al-Ḥasan and stated explicitly by later authors). Is it at all possible that evil proceed from God?—Al-Ḥasan's answer is unequivocal:

Therefore, O Commander of the Faithful, understand what the Book (teaches) you and leave alone the erroneous opinions (*al-akwāʿ*) of those who do not know about God's decree (*qaḍāʾ*) and His judgement (*ḥukm*). Because God says this (i.e. Koran III, 182/178) meaning that God did not change (i.e. withdraw and replace by its opposite) a favour He had bestowed on people (*lam yakun mughayyiran niʿmatan anʿamahā ʿala qaumin*), until they changed (i.e. corrupted) what is in their souls. Thus at first favour came from God but the change (*taghyir*) came from men (*al-ʿibād*), because they disobeyed His commandment as He said (Koran XIV, 28-29): "Have you not considered those who have bartered (*baddalū*) God's favour for infidelity (*kufʿ*, meaning also: ingratitude, cf. *infra*, p. 23 note 1) and caused their people to descend into the house of perdition, into Hell". Thus favour was from God, and the barter (change, *tabdīl*) from men, because they failed to do (*tarakū*) what He had commanded and they did (*ʿamilū*) that which He had forbidden them. (Although) God has said (Koran VI, 151): "Draw not near unto abominations (*al-fawāḥish*), neither overt nor secret ones" (p. 68, *ult.*-p. 69, l. 6).

In other words, man's happiness is a favour from God, but his plight is incurred by his own disobedience. This obedience is of his own making and is not brought about by God or pre-ordained by Him:

What God has forbidden is not from Him, because He does not approve of what He is displeased with (*lā yarḍā mā saḥhiḥa*), and is not displeased with what He approved of, for God has said (Koran XXXIX, 7): "If you are ungrateful (*taḥfurū*, which means also: you disbelieve), verily God has no need of you (*ghanīy 'ankum*). Yet He does not approve of ingratitude (*kufr* "infidelity") on the part of His servants, but if you are grateful (*tashkurū*, "you acknowledge"), then He will approve of it in you". Now, had disbelief (*kufr*) been of God's decree and His determination (*qaḍā' Allāh wa-qaḍarih*), He would have approved of it in him who committed ('*amila*) it (i.e. disbelief) (p. 69, l. 7-10; cf. *Klassen*, p. 19, l. 15-20, l. 2).

Kufr "disbelief" and *imān* "belief" are objects of the verbs '*amila*, *fa'ala* "act", "do", "commit". E.g. al-Ash'arī, *Ibāna*, p. 52, l. 11-12; al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, p. 281, l. 8 and 12. Cf. also *Tamhīd*, p. 338, l. 6-8 and Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932, p. 131, n. 4.

This idea, that men's evil actions do not proceed from God, is taken up again and again throughout the *risāla*. On p. 71, l. 2-5 (cf. *Klassen*, p. 20, l. 17-19) al-Ḥasan cautiously points out that when verse XCI, 7-8 of the Koran speaks of God as inspiring the soul with both its iniquity and its fear of God, it means that He inspires it with the knowledge of the difference between the two. In support of this he quotes the subsequent verses (XCI, 9-10): "Miserable is he who corrupts it" (i.e. the soul), adding: "If it had been He who corrupts it, He would not have made Himself miserable."

On p. 78, l. 3-9, al-Ḥasan's opponents quote verse IV, 78/80 ("All is from God"), to prove that disbelief, sin, disobedience, iniquity, wrong and all abominations are from God. He points out that this is not so. This is (as may be shown by the beginning of the same verse) an answer to the Munāfiqūn (those of Muḥammad's contemporaries who professed Islam only outwardly). Whenever health or plenty was theirs they would attribute it to God, but when poverty or illness overtook them they made Muḥammad responsible for it. So God said: "All is from God". It is in keeping with al-Ḥasan's attitude that prior to mentioning and discussing verse IV, 78/80, he quotes the subsequent verse (IV, 79/81): "Whatever of good befalls you, it is from Allāh, and whatever of ill befalls you it is from yourself".

Cf. e.g. al-Ash'arī, Ibāna, p. 55, l. 3-11; al-Bāqillānī, Tamhīd, §§ 546-548; id., al-Inṣāf fī-mā yajib i'tiqāduh wa-lā yajūz al-jahl bih, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, second edition, Cairo, 1382/1963, pp. 152-153; al-Ṣāhib Ibn 'Abbād, Ibāna, p. 20, l. 11-ult.; al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr . . . ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, 1374 f., vol. VIII, pp. 555-558.

In the earliest stages of the discussion of the origin of evil the question was asked: The child of adultery, like any other child, is created by God in its mother's womb. So is it God who is responsible for adultery? If so, why is the adulterer punished? Al-Ḥasan explains on p. 74, l. 1-4, that God does not punish the adulterer because of the child. He punishes him for his adultery which is an act of disobedience. This disobedience is not identical with the child. The adulterer who puts his semen where it does not belong is like a man who sows his seed in land other than his own. Both are acts of disobedience, whether God makes this seed sprout or not.

Cf. C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien*, Leipzig 1924, vol. I, p. 440; Ritter, *Der Islam*, vol. 21, 1933, pp. 57-58. (The passage Ritter quotes there, is from the early heresiographer Khushaish ibn Aṣram [died 253/867, *cf.* W. M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, London, 1948, p. 52, l. 23-88 and p. 122 f.]. It is from a fragment by him, quoted by al-Malaṭī, *Tanbih*, ed. Dederling, Istanbul, 1936, p. 134, l. 8-11.).

In another passage (p. 72, l. 4-15), al-Ḥasan argues against those who "declare themselves innocent and attribute iniquity (*ẓulm*, wrong) to their Lord". He quotes verses from the Koran in which Adam says that he has "wronged his own soul" (Koran VII, 23) and Moses describes his sin of murder as "the work of Satan" (Koran XXVIII, 15-16). Moses did not think his sin had come from God, nor did Adam deem his to be of God's decree and determination (*qadā' wa-qadar*). Nobody would like to be considered the "author of wrong" (*ṣāhib al-ẓulm*). So how dare these people attribute to God what they would not have approved when applied to themselves?

In this last passage we notice that, along with man himself, Satan appears as the author of sin, with reference to Koran XXVIII, 15-16. Compare also Koran VII, 11-17. 8

In this last-mentioned passage (p. 72, l. 4-15) as well as in the section I have translated above from p. 69, l. 7-10, al-Ḥasan refutes not only the notion that men's disobedience, their unbelief, their evil actions come from God and that He be considered their author and source but also the idea that these actions are pre-ordained by God's decree and determination (*qaḍā' wa-qadar*).

God is not one to ordain a decree (*qaḍā'*) and then to disapprove of His own decree ¹. Oppression and wrong (*al-jawr wa'l-ẓulm*) are not decreed by God. But His decree (*qaḍā'*) is His commandment (*amruhu*) to do good, be just and give

¹ Compare Ritter, *Der Islam*, vol. 21, 1933, p. 61, l. 8 f. Here al-Ḥasan himself says almost the very words which Abū Ṭālib, quoted there by Ritter, makes him condemn.

(gifts) to (poor) relations. He forbids abomination and iniquity: He has said (Koran XVII, 23): "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none save Him, and (that you show) kindness towards (your) parents" (p. 69, l. 10-13).

In the same manner as he equates God's decree (*qadā'*) with His commandment, he deals with the second part of the hendiadys: determination (*al-qadar*, predestination):

Respect the Book of God, O Commander of the Faithful, and do not tamper with it. Do not give a wrong interpretation: God would not prohibit men openly from (doing) something, and then destine them (*yugaddirahum*) secretly to (do) it, as the ignorant and the heedless say. Had this been so, He would not have said: "Do what you will" (Koran XLI, 40), (p. 70), but He would have said: "Do what I have destined you to do" (*mā qaddartu 'alaykum*).—He would not have said (Koran XVIII, 29): "He who so wills, let him believe", but He would have said: "He whom I will (to believe)—let him believe, and he whom I will (to disbelieve) let him disbelieve".—He said (Koran XXXIII, 38): "The commandment of God is a determinate decree (*wa-kāna amru 'llāhi qadaran maqdūran*)". Thus is commandment (*amr*) is His determination (*qadar*) and His determination is His commandment (p. 69, l. 19-p. 70, l. 4).

Al-Ḥasan concludes this point by quoting Koran VII, 29, saying that God does not command evil. Al-Ḥasan's tacit suggestion is, that if this is so, and His commandment is equal to His determination and His decree, this means that He does not determine nor decree evil. God has made His point clear by means of His Book and His prophets. He has left men without an argument—*hujja*—against Him (p. 70, l. 4-8). In later writings, too, one comes across this conception, as if God and men were holding a perpetual debate, each trying to outdo the other's arguments.

Al-Ḥasan's insistence (p. 69, l. 11-13 and p. 70, l. 4) that God's 'decree' and 'determination' are nothing but His commandments takes the sting out of many of those verses in the Koran which apparently advocate belief in predestination. The importance of this does not come out in the analysis of J. Obermann (*JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, p. 144 and note 17).

The expression 'decree and determination' (*al-qadā' wa'l-qadar*) was one of those stock-phrases of Arabian pre-Islamic fatalism, which found their way into Islamic theistic thought.

It will be remembered that the Arabs before Islam worshipped several deities, but believed in one supreme God, Allāh. One of the two terms which Islam took over from pre-Islam, *qadā'* and *qadar*, seems to have been connected with this. Both terms derive ultimately from pre-Islamic poetry. *Qadar* was one of the words for 'fate'. But *qadā'* means literally 'sentence' (in the legal sense) or 'judgment', 'decision'.

"As a matter of fact, it seems meaningless to speak of a decision or decree without thinking originally of somebody who decides or decrees. Wellhausen is probably right when he says that *qadā'* is an abbreviation for *qadā' Allah*" (H. Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism*, Uppsala, 1955, p. 12.). Thus in pre-Islamic poetry,

qaḍā' meant already God's decision, while *qadar* was one of the words for impersonal fate.

The Koran which categorically rejected pre-Islamic religion had no place for the notion of an impersonal fate. But *qaḍā'* in the sense of God's decree and decision, that is, the decision which regulates man's destiny, was readily accepted. The term *qadar* changed its meaning in the Koran. It could no longer mean fate. In its new environment it took on the same meaning as *qaḍā'* : "the pre-determining decree of God". (On the other hand *qadar* often appears in the Koran to denote "measure").

Thus in the Koran these terms no more express fatalism (belief in an impersonal fate), but another kind of determinism, namely predestination by God. In the *Hadīth* on the other hand much of the fatalistic outlook of pre-Islam comes through and there no clear distinction seems to be made between an impersonal fate and the Divine decree.

It has become necessary to repeat these well known facts (see W. Caskel, *Das Schicksal in der altarabischen Poesie*, Leipzig, 1926; W. Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, London, 1948 and H. Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism*), since they have been recently questioned by Dr. M. S. Seale, *Muslim Theology*, London, 1964, pp. 36 ff. Dr. Seale's argument is puzzling. For one thing why should the evidence of pre-Islamic poetry be ignored? Secondly, the fact that these two terms were used by one translator to translate a Syriac expression of an ultimately Greek idea does not prove that these Arabic terms did not convey the meaning of pre-determination long before that. The fact that two more or less synonymous terms appear in juxtaposition proves nothing. This is a very common feature of Semitic languages. The Hebrew Bible is full of such expressions. Both the Arabic *qaḍā'* and the Hebrew-Aramaic *gəzar dīn* signify in the first place the decision of a judge in court. In their religious usage they describe God's judgement, or His decree. If these terms were once at a late stage used to render the "decree of the moirae", how could this be described as their "etymological derivation"? Nor does this prove any derivative connection between the Aramaic and the Arabic terms.

Those who believe in predestination—remarks al-Ḥasan on p. 75, l. 6-p. 76, l. 2 (*cf. Klassen*, p. 20, l. 13-16)—would blame predestination for any of their own shortcomings in questions of religion (*fī amr dīnīhim*). But when it comes to secular questions (*fī amr dunyāhum*), they act very carefully and prudently. None of them would think of abstaining from work because his sustenance (*rizq*) is provided by God. None of them would think of not irrigating his field because it was predestined whether the grain was going to sprout or not, or of leaving his cattle to graze unprotected because it was pre-ordained whether they would be stolen or torn to pieces by beasts of prey. Other similar examples are given.

Read with Obermann, *JAOS* vol. 55, 1935, on p. 75, l. 8 (of Ritter's text): "*liḥiqāq al-ḥaqq 'alayhim wa-khiffat al-bāṭil*", along with p. 76, l. 2.

These people foolishly think, says al-Ḥasan on p. 82, l. 13-19, that God forbids people to do the very things he has pre-ordained them to do, or that He blamed His Prophet for having done that which He had predestined him to do. But in reality none of the prophets attributed his own faults to any but himself.

The advocates of predestination understood Koran LVII, 22 to imply that every man's belief and disbelief, his obedience and his disobedience are all written in the Book of Destiny prior to his birth. Al-Ḥasan rejects this interpretation saying that what is meant is that people should not grieve over loss of property or income, nor at bereavements, nor rejoice at earthly gains. But this does not include matters of religion. There is nothing more worthy of grief than having missed acts of religious obedience. Al-Ḥasan supports his argument by reference to the context of this verse in *Sūra* LVII and to other verses in the Koran. God is far too just to blind a man and then tell him: "See, lest I punish you", or make him dumb and tell him: "Speak, lest I punish you" (p. 74, l. 5-19).

Al-Ḥasan's assertion that the evil actions of human beings neither derive from God nor are pre-ordained by Him, makes it necessary for him to tackle those verses of the Koran in which God is said to lead people into error.

E.g. Koran XLII, 46/45; XL, 33/34; XIII, 27/28 etc. Cf. I. Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, pp. 84-87. Some at least of the later Ash'arite authors understood the verses in which God is said to lead men astray in a much more literal sense than Goldziher did. And if such a literal interpretation had not been in vogue in al-Ḥasan's time, his zeal to refute this interpretation would have been inexplicable.

Thus al-Ḥasan says on p. 69, l. 13-18:

O Commander of the Faithful, it is the Book of God that speaks—and who speaks better than God—(Koran LXXXVII, 3): "He who determines and guides" and He did not say: "He who determines and leads astray". God has made (this) clear to His servants and has neither left them in confusion about their religion nor in doubt about their affairs, in so far as He has ascribed guidance (*al-hidāya*) to Himself but error (*al-ḡalāla*)¹ to His Prophet, saying (Koran XXXIV, 50): "Say: If I err, it is against myself that I shall err; but if I am rightly guided, it will be by that which my Lord reveals unto me". Do you then approve (of the fact) that error be from Muhammad and disapprove of the same in regard to ourselves? He has said (Koran XCII, 12): "Verily, it is for us to (give) guidance", but He has not said: "It is for us to lead astray".

Then, O Commander of the Faithful, consider His words: “O Lord, whoever did present this (i.e. error, misleading) to us—inflict on him a twofold punishment in Hell” (Koran XXXVIII, 62/61). Now if it were He who presented this to them . . .

(The sentence is not completed and the editor remarks: “The highly offensive sequence may be guessed. Is there a lacuna here or an ellipsis?”)

But God has made it clear to us who presented (error) to them and who led them astray saying (Koran XXXIII, 67): “And they said: O Lord, we obeyed our chiefs

¹ Strictly speaking *ḍalāla* is “going astray”, but it is used also as a synonym to *iḍlāl* “leading astray”. This ambiguity helps al-Ḥasan.

and our elders, and they led us away from the path". And it was the chiefs and elders who presented disbelief to them and misled them from the way after they had trodden it.

And he goes on (p. 71, l. 10 ff.):

(And think, O Commander of the Faithful) about His words: "Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray, both jinn and men. We will trample them under our feet, that they be among the nethermost" (Koran XLI, 29). And He said: "We have guided him unto the right way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful (*kafûr* meaning also 'disbelieving')" (Koran LXXVI, 3), meaning: We have made the way known to him, he either being grateful, so that We reward him, or ungrateful (disbelieving: *yakfûra*) so that We punish him for his ungratefulness (*kufûr* 'unbelief') (as the Koran XXXI, 12 says): "For whoever believes shall believe to (the advantage of) his own soul, but if anyone disbelieves (*kafara* = is ungrateful)—verily, God has no need, He is praiseworthy¹. God has also said (Koran XX, 79): "And Pharaoh led his people astray, he did not guide (them)". And say, O Commander of the Faithful, as God has said: that it was Pharaoh who led his people astray²—and do not disobey the word of God and attribute to God only what He has consented to ascribe to Himself, because He has said: "It is for Us to (give) guidance. Ours is the next world as well as this one" (Koran XCII, 12-13). Therefore guidance is from God and error from man (p. 71, l. 10-ult.).

The last sentence of this passage brings to mind that Khushaish ibn Aşram (d. 253/867) ascribes to the early Qadarites, or a group of them, the view that:

good actions and goodness are from God, but wickedness and base actions are from (men) themselves (*apud* al-Malaṭī, *Tanbih*, ed. Dederling, p. 126, l. 15-17; W. M. Watt, *Free Will*, p. 52, l. 2-5; cf. Ritter, *Der Islam*, vol. 21, p. 58).

I have not found such a view propounded or refuted in any later work.

And consider, O Commander of the Faithful, the words of God (Koran XXVI, 99): "It was the evil-doers who led us astray" and His words (Koran XXVII, 53): "Satan was to man an obvious enemy"; and His words: "As for Thamûd, We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance, because of what they had earned" (*kānū yakṣibūn*, i.e., what they had done so as to deserve blindness) (cf. Koran XLI, 17/16). So the beginning of guidance was from God (i.e., of His making), but the beginning of their deserving blindness (had its origin) in their misleading desires (p. 71, ult.—p. 72, l. 4).

¹ We must keep in mind that *kafara* means not only 'to disbelieve', but also 'to be ungrateful', 'not to acknowledge a favour'. *Shakara*, its antonym, denotes: 'to thank, to be grateful, to acknowledge'. It seems to me that al-Ḥasan has this whole spectrum of meanings in mind when he quotes these verses. The first part of verse XXXI, 12 is said by the commentators to mean that when a man thanks God, he helps himself because he is rewarded by God for his thankfulness. That al-Ḥasan too understood the verse in this way becomes quite clear from the sentence which he inserts between LXXVI, 3 and XXXI, 12: "... being grateful, so that We reward him ...". See also T. Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, Tokyo, 1959, p. 38 and pp. 111-122 and M. M. Bravmann in *Der Islam*, vol. 35, 1960, pp. 13-18.

² Our text as it stands conveys this meaning in good Arabic and the correction offered by J. Obermann, *JAOS*, vol. 55, p. 158 seems to me unnecessary.

The incomplete quotation of the last verse seems to have been intended by al-Ḥasan in order to emphasize his point that Thamūd's blindness was deserved by their own actions, and this is what he says in line 4, and compare further on, p. 73, l. 2: "He misleads the evildoers *because* of their rejection (of God's message) and their enmity". Therefore I consider J. Obermann's conjecture *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, p. 159 unnecessary.

Later the Mu'tazilites would quote verse XLI, 17/16 to prove that men sin of their own accord in spite of the Divine guidance. Cf. e.g., al-Ash'arī, *Ibāna*, pp. 64-65 and al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, p. 317, l. 2-3, who quote and refute this argument.—The quotation of Koran, XX, 85/86 to prove that leading astray is a human rather than a divine action recurs in al-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād's *Risāla fi'l-hidāya wa'l-dalāla*, ed. Ḥusayn 'Alī Mahfūz, Tehran, 1955, p. 43. Al-Ṣāhib also follows Ḥasan in blaming both man and Satan for misleading (*ibid.*). Cf. al-Ash'arī, *Ibāna*, pp. 56-57.

Further down the page al-Ḥasan goes on:

And they contend and say: God has said (Koran XIII, 27): "He leads astray whomsoever He wishes, and He guides" and they do not look at what precedes these words and what follows them. They would not have erred if they had paid attention to the words that precede these verses and follow them, since they point out (the meaning of) these (verses). He has said (Koran XIV, 27): "God strengthens those who believe by His steadfast word both in this life and in the life hereafter. He will lead the wrongdoers astray. God does what He pleases". Therefore one of the things He pleases to do is to strengthen¹ those who believe on account of their belief and their righteousness, and to lead astray the wrongdoers on account of their rejection (of God's message) and their enmity. And He has said (Koran LXI, 5): "And when they had gone astray, God led their hearts astray" and it is because they had gone astray, that He led their hearts astray. And He has said (Koran II, 26-27): "He misleads many thereby (i.e. by the parable of the gnat) and guides many by it; but He misleads thereby only the evil-doers, who break the covenant of God after they have made it, and sever what God has commanded to be joined, and act corruptly on earth. They shall perish" (p. 72, l. 15—p. 73, l. 6.).

Ibn al-Murtaḍā' (*Klassen*, p. 20, l. 6-12) deduced from this passage that al-Ḥasan maintained that it is possible for God to punish man by withdrawing His grace (*lutf*) from him. He adds that this opinion was upheld by some of the later Mu'tazilite authorities and rejected by others.

The subject of leading astray is taken up again towards the end of the *risāla* (p. 78, l. 11 ff.): "Willing though I am to give you counsel, it will not profit you if God seeks to mislead you (*yaghwīkum*). He is your Lord and to Him you shall return" (Koran XI, 34). Those, against whom al-Ḥasan argues, interpret the verse to mean that Noah used for many years to admonish his people to worship God, but never was sure whether

¹ The text has أثبت. Ritter offers two alternative guesses, Obermann (*JAOS* vol. 55, 1935, p. 159) a third one. Perhaps the correct reading is *ayyuthabbita* (= *an yuthabbita*; cf. Wright, *Arabic Grammar*², vol. I, pp. 15-16, § 14), and the *yā*' was dropped by a copyist.

God was not going to mislead his audience, and thus to make his admonition futile. Refuting this interpretation of the text, al-Ḥasan points out that the preceding verses of that chapter indicate that Noah's people wearied of his admonition and challenged him to bring upon them the punishment of which he used to warn them. It was in answer to this that Noah said these words. He meant: "When God's punishment comes, I shall not be able to help you even if I wished to". According to al-Ḥasan the verb "*yaghwīkum*" does not signify here "mislead you" but "punish you" as does the same verbal root in XIX, 58/59. According to al-Ḥasan Noah's answer means that if belief comes only when the punishment had already come, repentance will not be accepted (p. 78, l. 11- p. 79, l. 9). Repentance or belief which appear only in the very presence of punishment will not be accepted and do not merit reward.

We have already seen that the opposite of leading astray (*idlāl*) is guidance (*hudā, hidāya*). The passage on p. 76, l. 3-9 is a refutation of the view that verse VI, 35 ("Had God wished, He would have guided all of them") implies that those who are wicked are so because God did not wish to guide them. According to al-Ḥasan this verse is a reproach to Muḥammad. Muḥammad was unhappy because his Meccan contemporaries were obstinate and refused to believe. So God told him he should not worry: God wants to put them to trial, in order to reward or punish them. But had He wished, He could have forced them to obey Him (*yujbirahum 'ala 'l-ḥā'a*). This foreshadows the later Mu'tazilite theory of *iljā'* (coercion): It is left to men to choose between belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Yet God has the power to coerce the unbelievers to believe in Him and obey Him. But such enforced belief and obedience would not entitle them to any reward. (This is therefore a point on which the Mu'tazilites agree with al-Ḥasan, and do not differ from him as implied by Obermann, *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, p. 156, note 65).

See *Intiṣār*, p. 121, l. 8-11 and p. 122, l. 4-7; al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 512, l. 6-10, *ibid.*, p. 552, l. 10-11 (*cf. ibid.* pp. 552-553); *Luma‘*, § § 57-58 (p. 27) and p. 31, l. 11. (In *Ibāna*, p. 51, l. 7-21, al-Ash‘arī seems wilfully to misrepresent the Mu‘tazilite view. *Cf.* W. M. Watt, *Free Will* p. 160-162). *Tamhid*, § 476; al-Ṣāhib Ibn ‘Abbād, *Ibāna*, p. 18, l. 3 and ll. 6-10; ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Asadābādī, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-‘adl wa’l-tawḥīd*, vol. XIII, ed. Abu ‘l-‘Alā ‘Affī, Cairo, 1382/1962, p. 195, l. 7-13; Imām al-Ḥaramayn ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād ilā qawāfi‘ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i‘tiqād*, ed. Muḥ. Yūsuf Mūsā and ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1950, pp. 241-242.

Another verse which al-Ḥasan’s opponents bring forward is LXXXI, 28-29 (“You do not will if God does not will it”) (= LXXVI, 30; together with this al-Ḥasan quotes LXXIV, 37 as if to ‘mitigate’ LXXXI, 28-29 by it). Al-Ḥasan has to accept the belief that man’s will is subject to

God's will (reading on p. 73, l. 17 with Obermann, *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, p. 159: *lam nakun li-nashā'*). But he says that this means mainly that He shows us the right way, and quotes other verses to prove that God always wills man to obey and be penitent (so that there can be no question of man being unable to obey, because of God not willing him to will) (p. 73, l. 14-p. 74, l. 1). The question of God's will, will become very important in later discussions.

The determinists quote Koran VI, 125: "If God wishes to guide a man, He will open his breast to Islam. But, if He wishes to mislead him, He will make his breast close and narrow, though he were climbing up to Heaven. Thus God lays ignominy on the disbelievers". They understand this verse to mean that God opened the hearts of some men to belief thus making them capable of fulfilling the acts of obedience which He had imposed upon them. He opened their hearts from the very beginning, not because they deserved it by their righteous actions. On the other hand, He made the hearts of other men narrow, so as to make them err and be punished in Hell.

Al-Ḥasan objects to this interpretation. The Koran says that God will not impose on man anything beyond his power. Men have been created to worship God, and have the power to do this. Therefore God will open to Islam the hearts of those who obey Him as a reward for their obedience (compare p. 81, l. 7-12 where guidance is said to be a reward for obedience). He will make obedience easy for them and disobedience difficult. On the other hand, God will narrow the hearts of those who do not fulfil His commandments and persevere in infidelity and error in spite of their ability to repent. This will be the punishment for their infidelity, their straying-from-the-path and their unwillingness to repent. The widening and narrowing of the bosom mentioned in the Book of God admonish men to act in such a way that they deserve the widening of the bosom rather than its narrowing. It is not mentioned in order to make them despair of God's mercy (p. 79, l. 10-p. 80, *ult.*). (The restoration of the text of p. 80, l. 3-6, offered by Obermann, *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, pp. 160-161 seems reasonable although not strictly necessary.)

The belief al-Ḥasan tried to refute in the last-quoted passage was that God "narrows the hearts of certain people", and thus makes them unable to believe in God and obey Him, and as a result commits them to Hell. Closely connected with this is the belief that some men were created initially for Hell. Al-Ḥasan's adversaries quoted Koran VII, 179/178: "We have created for Hell many of the jinn and of mankind. They have hearts wherewith they do not understand, eyes wherewith they do not

see, ears wherewith they do not hear. They are like cattle, nay, they go more astray. These are the neglectful". They took the verse to mean that God at the beginning of creation singled out certain people for Hell. These are not able to fulfil what is demanded of them. And He has set apart others, predestined for paradise (*al-janna*), who in turn are unable to disobey Him. Neither these nor those are able to change, in the same way as a man cannot change the measurements of his own body or its colour (*cf.* Ritter, *Der Islam*, vol. 21, pp. 60-61, who refers to Matthew VI, 27). Al-Ḥasan endeavours to refute this belief by saying that the second part of the verse—"They have hearts wherewith they do not understand, etc." —shows that the verse means: God creates them, but commits them to Hell because of their evil demeanour. The preposition *li* in *dhara'nā li-jahannam* ("We have created for Hell") does not mean 'for'. The expression means rather: He created them, but they eventually ended up there. Other verses of the Koran and one from poetry are quoted to illustrate this usage of the preposition (p. 76, l. 10-p. 77, l. 3; *cf.* Obermann, *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, p. 152).

The examples which al-Ḥasan quotes for this *lām al-'āqiba* ("particle of result") are: Koran XXVIII, 8/7 "And the House of Pharaoh took (Moses) up *to be* (i.e., with the result that he was) a foe and sorrow to them"; Koran III, 178/172: "It is *so that* they should increase their sins (i.e., with the result that they increase them) that We give them long lives". (The Arabs identified the conjunction *li* ('in order that', 'so that', 'to') with the preposition *li* ('to', 'for', 'because of'). *Cf.* Wright, *Arabic Grammar*³, vol. I, p. 291C). The line of poetry al-Ḥasan quotes is:

wa-li'l-mawti taghdhū 'l-wālidātu sikhālahā
kamā li-kharābi 'l-dahri tubna 'l-masākinu

"It is *for* death that mothers feed their lambs
 As houses are built *for* Time's destruction".

It is interesting to note that al-Şāhib Ibn ‘Abbād will later on follow al-Ḥasan closely in his interpretation of Koran VII, 179/178 "We have created for Hell many jinn and men". In order to prove that "for Hell" means "with the result of ending up in Hell" he too quotes in his *Ibāna*, p. 21 verses III, 178/172 and XXVIII, 8/7. The latter verse is quoted in his *Tadhkira*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Āl Yāsīn in *Nafā'is al-makḥḥūḥat*, fasc. 2, Baġdād 1954, p. 91 for the same purpose. In his *Risāla fi'l-hidāya*, p. 49, al-Şāhib repeats al-Ḥasan's quotation from poetry (with the reading *al-dūri* instead of *al-dahri*) along with other verses of poetry as well as Koran XXVIII, 8/7. See also al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān, ad* Koran VII, 179/178 (ed. Sidon, 1936, vol. II, p. 502) as well as Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. *l-w-m* (ed. Beirut, 1956, vol. XII, p. 562); al-Jawharī, *Şiḥāḥ*, Būlāq, 1282, vol. II, p. 336; al-Murtaḏā' al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, Cairo, 1306-7, vol. IX, p. 66, all of which quote the verse anonymously. — I am obliged to Mr. Babayoff of the Hebrew University Concordance of Arabic Poetry for the three last references.

In another part of the *risāla* too (p. 73, l. 6-10), al-Ḥasan explains his conviction that the sentence of punishment always follows upon sin, never precedes it.

On p. 74, l. 19- p. 75, l. 6, verse XI, 105/106 is discussed ("Some are wretched, some blissful"). This was taken to mean that children are destined in the wombs of their mothers: the "blissful" for Paradise, the "wretched" for Hell (see also p. 75, l. 9 and *cf.* Watt, *Free Will*, p. 18) and that neither can change their destiny. Al-Ḥasan points out that if this were true, the Prophet's admonitions would be futile. He rightly remarks that in its context in the Koran, this verse means that on the Day of Judgement some will go to Hell and some to Paradise. And he adds that their future bliss or wretchedness depends on their own actions and obedience at present (*al-yawm* as opposed to the Day of Judgement).

Just as al-Ḥasan knows that in the case of rigid predestination the Prophet's commandments and admonitions would be of no avail, he knows also that, in order to be just, reward and punishment must be deserved by acts or omissions, which in turn must be within man's power (capability) (p. 70, l. 8-15). The idea of moral desert presupposing power (capability) to act is evident:

Consider, O Commander of the Faithful, the words of God: "To whichever of you who wishes to come forward (*yataqaddam*) or hang back (*yata'akhhhar*)" (Koran LXXIV, 37), because God has given them capability (*qudra*) by which they advance or hang back so that he who does good should deserve Paradise (*al-janna*) and he who does evil should deserve Hell (*al-nār*). Had things been as those maintain who have false opinions¹ they would not have been able (*mā kāna ilayhim*) to come forward nor to hang back. He who comes forward would not be praised nor he who hangs back blamed for what he had done. Because, according to their assertion, this is not from them and not in their hands (*laysa minhum wa-la ilayhim*), but something done with them (*'umila bihim*). And God would have said mentioning their recompense (*jazā'*): "A recompense for that which has been done with them" and "A recompense for that which I have predestined (*katabtu* "written") for them" and He would not have said: (Koran XXXII, 17): "A reward for what they had done" (p. 70, l. 8-15; *cf.* Klassen, p. 20, l. 3-5).

We must emphasize a point made near the beginning of the section just translated: Without capability for *alternative* action—(choice implied)—there is no moral desert.

We must emphasize a point made near the beginning of the section just translated: Without capability for *alternative* action—(choice implied)—there is no moral desert.

Much of the later theological discussion turns round the concept of man's power or capability (*qudra, istiṭā'a*; cf. e.g. R. Brunschvig, *Devoir et pouvoir* in *Studia Islamica*, vol. XX, 1964, pp. 5-46.). One of the main points al-Ḥasan makes is that God will not impose on man anything that is beyond his power. Al-Ḥasan does not use the later terminology but the meaning is implied in several of the passages already quoted as well as on p. 74, l. 17-19 and p. 81, l. 12-15.

More emphasis is laid on man's capability to believe than on his power to act and obey God's commandments in general. It is inconceivable to

¹ *Al-mubṭilūn*, not "nihilists" as in *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, pp. 145-7 and note 23.

al-Ḥasan that God should withhold this capability from certain people as his opponents pretend: p. 73, l. 10-14:

One of the verses about which they contend is (X, 101/100): "No soul may believe except with the permission of God". But permission is allowing-free-access (*takhlīya*)¹. And God has already allowed it (i.e. the soul) free-access to belief and has given it power (*qudra*) for it and has said (IV, 64/63): "We sent Our apostles forth so that they should be obeyed by God's leave". And God is not one to send an apostle to be obeyed and then prevent His creatures from obeying him. How far this would be from the description of God and His justice and judgement (or, according to Ritter's conjecture: wisdom).

On p. 81, l. 15-p. 82, l. 12 the view that the unbelievers have no way to belief, that God has prevented them from accepting His call, has doomed them (*jabarahum*) to infidelity and determined (*qadara*) it for them, is vigorously rejected by al-Ḥasan. He confronts them with Koran verses in which the infidels are invited to believe, ask God's pardon and refrain from evil actions. He implies that it is impudent to consider God demanding something and at the same time preventing it.

It is a common belief to most Sunnī Muslim theologians that God had from all eternity a detailed fore-knowledge of all future events. For those who considered man's free choice prerequisite to his desert of reward and punishment, the question arose whether Divine prescience and human free choice are compatible. Al-Ḥasan's answer is: Man chooses freely; God knew in all eternity what man was going to choose. Obermann, *JAOS*, vol. 55, 1935, p. 149, *ult. f.* and note 43, sees in this view a symptom of al-Ḥasan's pragmatism. I shall try to show in another article that most of the Mu'tazila held exactly this view on the subject. Let us now listen to al-Ḥasan (p. 77, l. 4-p. 78, l. 2. In the following translation I shall add in Arabic those words which will reappear in later discussions as technical terms; see e.g. R. Brunschvig, *Devoir et pouvoir*):

And they dispute about God's (fore-)knowledge (*ʿilm Allāh*) and say: God knew (beforehand) the unbelief of certain people. Therefore they are not capable of believing (*la yastafīʿūn al-īmān*), because the (fore-)knowledge is what prevents (*al-māniʿ*) (them). Thus they come to maintain that God has imposed the duty (*kallafa*) upon His servants (*ʿibādahu*) to do what they were incapable of doing (*ahkdh mā lā yaqdirūn ʿalā ahkdhik*) and to omit what they were incapable of omitting (*tark ma la yaqdirūn ʿalā tarkih*). But God has given the lie to them saying (Koran II, 286): "God imposes (*yukallif*) upon a soul only that which is in its capacity (*wusʿihā*)". It is rather that God *knew* that infidelity (*kufr*) would be *their choice* (*bi-ʿkhtiyyārihim*), because they followed their desires. They compared this (their inability to believe) to (the fact) that God knows beforehand their shapes and their colours, and how tall or how short they would be. God knew that

¹ *Takhlīya*, literally "leaving room for", "allowing", signifies that God allows man's action, does not interfere with it. Cf. e.g. *Intiṣār*, p. 15, *Lumaʿ*, pp. 57-58, *Mughnī*, vol. XIII, p. 487, l. 10-12. "*Takhlīya* is probably the nearest word in Arabic, etymologically, to 'freedom'" (W. M. Watt, *Free Will*, p. 117).

they would not be able to go beyond these measurements. But the one is not like the other, because tallness, shortness, forms and colours are actions (*fiʿl*) of God on them, for which they have no previous *choice* (*taqdīm ikhtiyār*) and which they have no power (*qudra*) to change. But God knew (beforehand) that they would choose (afterwards) unbelief (*kufʾ*) because of their desires. And He knew that had they been averse (to disbelief), they would not have done it (*tarakūh*, i.e., not indulged in it) because they were capable (*qādirīn*) (of this) by the capability (*istiḥāʿa*) God had put in them (or: created —*jaʿala*) for the purpose of putting their belief and righteousness to the test.

Al-Ḥasan goes on illustrating this conception of prescience with examples from Koran XVIII, 60-83 and IX, 42.

Muʿtazilite thought and even terminology are anticipated here. The similarities with al-Ṣāhib Ibn ʿAbbād are striking.

This letter of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri is undoubtedly an expression of a sincere, genuinely religious protest against the belief in divine pre-determination of human actions, because it contradicts divine justice and has an adverse influence on human morals.

“Die Lehre vom menschlichen *qadar* beruht also auf der Theodizee” (E. Mainz in *Der Islam*, vol. 22, 1934/35, p. 194, referring to Strothmann, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 1911, p. 59). For the moral background of the Qadarite attitude cf. Ritter in *Der Islam*, vol. 21, p. 59; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Klassen*, p. 81, l. 4-17. See also T. Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, Stockholm, 1917, pp. 141-2 (Diss. Uppsala).